

## A service for 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 (StF)

### Call to Worship: Psalm 111 verses 1 to 3

Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. Amen.

*We open with one of Graham Kendrick's early compositions. Hymn number 30, 'Jesus, stand among us' (verses 1 & 2)*

**1. Jesus, stand among us**

**At the meeting of our lives,**

**Be our sweet agreement**

**At the meeting of our eyes.**

**O Jesus, we love you, so we gather here;**

**Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.**

**2. So to you we're gathering**

**Out of each and every land,**

**Christ the love between us**

**At the joining of our hands;**

**O Jesus, we love you, so we gather here;**

**Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.**

© *Graham Kendrick – Kingsway's Thankyou Music 1977*

### **Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.**

Almighty God all glory, honour, power and praise are yours, for you spoke and brought our universe to life; you made the earth on which we live and not only created human beings, but gave us stewardship of this beautiful planet. Through your great faithfulness, you sustain us and all living things. In your love, you call us to you as your earthly sons and daughters, offering us a covenant of love and faithfulness. You know everything about us our virtues and vices, our successes and our failures and you love us so much that you took human form and lived among us as Christ Jesus, so we might understand how you want us live. His death at Calvary and resurrection on the third day broke the power of sin and death, offering us a special new relationship with you and the offer of everlasting life through faith in Jesus. As we come to worship you today, take away all anxieties and distractions, so we may worship you in spirit and truth.

Lord, we have come to offer heartfelt thanks for the many blessings we have received from you: our lives; our work and rest; our homes, friends and families; the opportunities and experiences that have fulfilled us; for challenges that have tested us and shaped our character. Most of all, thank you for loving us even when we are loveless and unlovable at our very worst. Forgive us when we say and do things that cause offence and hurt our neighbours and help us to lead better lives, for Jesus said if we repent in his name, you will pardon us.

Merciful heavenly Father, as you hear and answer our prayers, we believe that you have forgiven us and call us to follow you once again. May we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that, by serving our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, we may honour you always, in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

### **As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

*“So let us learn how to serve / And in our lives enthrone him, / Each other’s needs to prefer, / For it is Christ we’re serving.” Wonderful words by Graham Kendrick – written for ‘Spring Harvest’, (can you believe it?), 37 years ago! Hymn number 272, ‘The Servant King’.*

**1. From heaven You came,  
Helpless babe, entered our world,  
Your glory veiled; not to be served  
But to serve and give Your life  
That we might live. *Chorus:***

*This is our God, the Servant King,  
He calls us now to follow Him,  
To bring our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship to the Servant King.*

**2. There in the garden of tears,  
My heavy load he chose to bear;  
His heart with sorrow was torn,  
‘Yet not My will but Yours,’ He said. *Chorus:***

**3. Come see His hands and His feet,  
The scars that speak of sacrifice ;  
Hands that flung stars into space  
To cruel nails surrendered. *Chorus:***

**4. So let us learn how to serve,  
And in our lives enthrone Him;  
Each other’s needs to prefer,  
For it is Christ we’re serving. *Chorus:***

© Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

***In our prayers of intercession we bring our concerns to God.***

God of all grace, we thank you for the wonderful world on which we live: its beauty and self-sustaining nature. However, we are painfully aware of the brokenness that mars the glory of this planet, much of which is due to mankind’s failure to live as you call us to. In response to your lovingkindness to us, we would act as your earthly hands, by reaching out to neighbours who are in any kind of trouble or need. Grant us courage, steadfastness, wisdom and compassion so we may serve as you call us to, and in circumstances we know we are powerless, we turn to you, for to you all things are possible.

God of shalom, we pray for peace in those countries where wars are being waged, especially wars in Syria and Sudan that have lasted for years. May your Holy Spirit breathe hope and new life into the dry bones of old conflicts and may your love overcome the hatred inhuman hearts. Bless with success the work of peacemakers and those who work with the victims of conflict, terrorism and persecution. Guide the governments of the nations of the world, so they may work for justice and peace, learn to negotiate and resolve disagreements without resorting to violence and oppression. May world leaders strive to end poverty which cripple lives of so many people, here and abroad.

Heavenly Father, hear our prayer for victims of COVID 19, both here and abroad. Grant national leaders the wisdom to adopt policies that will protect the population until this pandemic is brought under control. We pray for the NHS, scientists and keyworkers as they continue their struggle to bring an end to this threat to humankind. Keep them

safe and crown their endeavours with success, O Lord. Help us to patiently observe guidelines laid down by the Government, difficult and confusing though they often are. Most of all, help us to feel that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we can all find comfort in your saving grace. Remember teachers and pupils as they begin a new school year in this time of anxiety and uncertainty. May the measures they will take enable young people to return to learning and socialising safely and may the re-opening of schools not result in a spike of COVID19.

Lord of wellbeing, may the light of your love shine upon people in our community who are sick in body, mind or spirit. May they find healing, renewed strength, comfort and peace, through the professional care and support they receive and also by experiencing your presence in their time of need. Help us to support one another as well as we can.

Gracious God, remember people who are living with a dementia, their friends, carers and families, as they seek to support them, especially in these turbulent times. Grant them a sense of being loved and valued for who they are, despite the great problems they face.

Loving God, remember in your mercy neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, unemployed, or who face the loss of their jobs when furlough ends. We pray for all whose relationships have broken down during lockdown, as well as any who mourn the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, confident that you will know their needs and will reach out to them. ....

Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy and hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, so they may find healing, courage, strength and peace.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide: unite us, so everybody may believe that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. Help your Church begin to plan for the ending of lockdown, as it faces many serious issues that have arisen during the past six months. Unite us in love and action, so we can find ways of supporting our communities and continue to bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and often hostile world.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us not only to lead good lives but to be bold in taking the light of the gospel to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

*“Be our strength in hours of weakness, / In our wanderings be our guide; / Through endeavour, failure, danger, / Father, be thou at my side.” Love Maria Willis wrote the words in 1856 and the hymn reflects some of the tension that existed in the USA just before the outbreak of the Civil War. Hymn number 518, ‘Father, hear the prayer we offer,’*

**1. Father, hear the prayer we offer:  
Not for ease that prayer shall be,  
But for strength that we may ever  
Live our lives courageously.**

**2. Not for ever in green pastures  
Do we ask our way to be;  
But the steep and rugged pathway  
May we tread rejoicingly.**

**3. Not for ever by still waters  
Would we idly rest and stay;  
But would smite the living fountains  
From the rocks along our way.**

**4. Be our strength in hours of weakness,  
In our wanderings be our guide;  
Through endeavour, failure, danger,  
Father, be thou at our side.**

© *Love Maria Willis {1824 – 1908}*

**Our Epistle is Romans chapter 12 verses 9 to 21**

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Amen.

**The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 16 verses 21 to 28**

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." Amen.

*We shall sing the hymn, 'Will you bear your cross for the kingdom's sake'*

**1. Will you bear your cross for the kingdom's sake**

**And accept the cost of serving?**

**Will you trust in Christ every step you take,**

**Though your prospects be unnerving? *Chorus:***

*Will you bring good news at whatever cost*

*To this world of sin and sadness?*

*Will you seek the broken and the lost;*

*Let your words and deeds bring gladness?*

**2. Will you bear the scorn and the bitterness  
Of the ones who won't receive you?  
Will you persevere, let your faith profess  
And not let your doubts deceive you? *Chorus:***

**3. Will your love endure when the world turns sour  
And although friends may reject you,  
Will you outface fears in the Spirit's power –  
Let the love of God protect you? *Chorus:***

**4. Will you bear your cross in the Saviour's name –  
Lay down all you have before him?  
Will your acts of grace Jesu's love proclaim,  
Show you worship and adore him? *Chorus:***

*We shall take good news at whatever cost  
To this world of sin and sadness.  
We shall seek the broken and the lost;  
Let our words and deeds bring gladness.*

*M. Rider 16<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2020 (To 'Have you heard God's voice?' StF 662) (45<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary)*

**Sermon:** *"If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"* Mt. 16:24

I like Simon Peter because he was both enthusiastic and fallible – certainly as prone to gaffes as any of us. His discipleship was a little like fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Let me explain. The Sea of Galilee lies nearly 700 feet below the Mediterranean and is subject to strong winds that are channelled through the surrounding hills. As a result, it is subjected to sudden fierce squalls that create waves five or six metres high. At the time of Jesus, fishermen would have been used to seas a flat as a mill-pond, yet within minutes a squall could arise with raging torrents that threatened to swamp the small craft used by local fishermen. Peter's discipleship reflected this: one minute he was on the crest of a wave; the next he was in the trough! The incident in our reading was typical, for he'd had earned Jesus' praise when he declared Jesus was the Messiah, the Promised One of God. Such a declaration of faith wouldn't have been difficult for Peter, because he had heard his master's teaching, witnessed Jesus' grasp of the Scriptures, his healings and his miracles. Peter recognized that these were the qualities of the longed-awaited Messiah. Peter's problem lay in what he said after his declaration of faith.

Remember, soon afterwards, Jesus told his disciples that he would go to Jerusalem only for the Sanhedrin, the religious Establishment, to reject him. Worse still, he declared that he would be killed and be raised on the third day. Such talk must have seemed ridiculous to his followers, especially to Peter. After all, they shared the Hebrew expectation that the Messiah would be like the one of **Isaiah 63**, who destroyed the enemies of the Jews on his own and whose clothes would be stained crimson with their blood. At that time, Jews expected the Messiah to lead an uprising that would sweep the Roman occupiers from the land, to restore the nation to the political and economic power enjoyed at the time of King David, before he compelled the people to observe a new covenant with the Lord. Peter and his friends would have thought God's Son couldn't be killed by mortal men – besides, neither God nor his angels would allow such a thing to happen – and as usual Peter was the one who voiced their objections.

**"Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!"**

Jesus turned and spoke sternly to Peter: **"Get behind me, Satan!"** he said. **"You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** He didn't mean that

Peter was the devil, but that his objections contradicted God's plan for the salvation of all people. It took the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost for them to truly understand that mankind's salvation needed Jesus to die – as the one perfect sacrifice whose blood washes away all sins – but Peter and the disciples could not comprehend then, because they believed in strength of arms rather than the all-conquering power of **racham** or **agape** as Greeks call **boundless love**.

When Jesus continued, saying, **“If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”** they would have been shaken, for the victim of crucifixion died under a Deuteronomic curse, **“Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.”** Moreover, crucifixion is a terrible death – the victim often hung for up to seventy-two hours in indescribable agony until he died from suffocation or exhaustion. For some of the disciples, the cost of discipleship was indeed death, but Christ was not demanding that his followers – including us – must perish on a cross. Unlike Islamic State, Christianity is not a death-cult. No, indeed, it is a LIFE-MOVEMENT. What Jesus asked of them and us is wholehearted commitment, whatever the cost – putting ourselves in God's hands and trusting his redemptive love – rather like the Covenant Prayer used by Methodists:

**‘I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.’**

Christ Jesus calls us to follow him, abandoning things the world holds dear, (materialism, power, fame), trusting in God the Father as Jesus himself did when he became incarnate, in Charles Wesley's words, **‘He left his Father's throne above – so free, so infinite his grace – emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.’** Remember that before Christ let sinners like us nail him to the cross, it required a tremendous act of will, for he had agonised over his fate in the Garden of Gethsemane only hours before.

Do we possess the will-power and courage to answer our call to play a part in God's kingdom, by building-up our communities? Coronavirus, recession and unemployment have shaken this country severely and many around us are experiencing serious ill-being. Yet, if you listen to the news you will see many countries far worse off than ours, so we must not become so preoccupied with our own woes that we ignore our neighbours' plight. You may say in despair that many churches remain closed and those that are holding acts of worship are facing serious restrictions, so what chance have we got as latter-day disciples?

It is true the situation seems bleak, but if you think this nation's problems, let alone world problems, are too big for us to handle, remember that there is nothing impossible for God and he walks by our side in our discipleship. If we support our neighbours and the wider community by working together, we can and shall make a difference. Community support groups, foodbanks, well-being and job-clubs can help people who are really struggling and Church can provide this kind of support, if not as individuals, by offering funds or practical support and by pooling what we have to offer with others to make a bigger impact. We cannot guarantee that all our efforts will be successful, but it is far better to try than to throw up our hands in despair and do nothing. If we freely offer all we have and are to the Lord, we honour our covenant.

Remember, the word covenant has roots not just in agreement or contract but in shackles – not the shackles of prisoners or slaves but unbreakable chains that won't

allow us to be torn from God. When he called us to proclaim the good news and baptize followers in his name, Jesus promised that he will be with us to the very end of the age – the chains of Christ’s covenant hold us fast today, but we are free to choose whether or not to answer his invitation to follow, for we are his friends, not slaves and any service we give is done as a response to his love for us, rather than a necessary duty to try to earn that love.

My friends, will you brave the hostility of our increasingly secular and selfish society which frequently rejects kingdom values? Will you speak up for justice for the poor and oppressed of the developing world as well as for people you know who are at risk of losing their jobs, or who are burdened by debt? Will you accept that might is not always right, for even our Lord’s helplessness at Calvary was strong enough to destroy Satan’s power? Remember, God is in control, even when our world is in chaos. I am convinced that love will overcome hatred and good will defeat evil as long as we remain faithful to God’s kingdom and its values! Will you take up your cross and play your part in God’s mission of love to our world? Amen.

*We shall close our worship with a hymn written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. Hymn number 673, ‘Will you come and follow me’.*

**1. Will you come and follow me**

**If I but call your name?**

**Will you go where you don’t know**

**And never be the same?**

**Will you let my love be shown,**

**Will you let my name be known,**

**Will you let my life be grown**

**In you, and you in me?**

**2. Will you leave yourself behind**

**If I but call your name?**

**Will you care for cruel and kind**

**And never be the same?**

**Will you risk the hostile stare**

**Should your life attract or scare,**

**Will you let me answer prayer**

**In you, and you in me?**

**3. Will you let the blinded see**

**If I but call your name?**

**Will you set the pris’ners free,**

**And never be the same?**

**Will you kiss the leper clean**

**And do such as this unseen,**

**And admit to what I mean**

**In you, and you in me?**

**4. Will you love the ‘you’ you hide**

**If I but call your name?**

**Will you quell the fear inside,**

**And never be the same?**

**Will you use the faith you’ve found**

**To reshape the world around**

**Through my sight and touch and sound / In you, and you in me?**

**5. Lord, your summons echoes true  
When you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you,  
And never be the same.  
In your company I'll go  
Where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus, I'll move and live and grow  
In you, and you in me.**

*Copyright John Bell & Graham Maule WGRG Ioana Community (1987)*

***Benediction***

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.